

A Meeting of the Minds by 14winters

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Summary:

Kali and Nancy meet in March 1985. From there, Nancy learns there's no limit to how strange things can get.

A Meeting of the Minds

It was spring. Nancy always remembered because the trees had been blooming in the woods around Hopper's cabin that day. The young woman had walked up, alone. It had just been Nancy and El there. It was a Thursday afternoon, and the boys and Max were at the library finding books for El, using Nancy's, Joyce's, Steve's, and Jonathan's library cards on top of their own so they could get as much as they could for her.

Nancy was in the living room with El, going through a pile of her old clothes for the younger girl, appropriate for the warming weather. The curtains were open. Because Nancy was there. Because Hopper trusted her to keep a look out for trouble. The shotgun Hopper had given her that fateful night was propped up by the front door.

Nancy caught the movement out of the corner of her eye first, and went for the shotgun even as she got a direct look at the girl outside. El came up beside her.

"Wait," El said, putting a hand on Nancy's arm as she lifted the shotgun. Her voice was soft, calm. Nancy looked at her, finding El's eyes transfixed on the approaching girl.

"She's my sister," El said, and went to open the front door.

Nancy set the shotgun back down, her heart still pounding. Her sister. Kali.

Nancy had only heard of her, when Hopper had talked about taking El to Chicago around Christmastime, three months ago. Kali had never come to Hawkins. Hopper had forbidden it, and Kali had agreed. That's all Nancy knew.

El opened the door and a beat later the two girls were in each other's arms, hugging tightly. Nancy watched, a few feet away, wary. When the sisters stepped apart, Kali's eyes moved immediately to Nancy, and Nancy knew she was being sized up.

Getting a closer look at Kali, Nancy realized they had to be close in

age—Kali couldn't be older than 18 or 19, but it was hard to tell. Her eyes were ancient, but in a different way than El's. Where El's eyes were quiet in their wisdom, always holding something back, Kali's stare held a barely suppressed power that she projected without any sort of barrier. It felt what Nancy imagined a knife to one's throat felt like.

Before either spoke, Kali turned and looked at the shotgun Nancy had leaned back up against the wall, before turning back to Nancy. "Is she like Mick?" Kali said, speaking to El without looking from Nancy's face.

El nodded, "Yes." The sisters stood shoulder to shoulder, and it occurred to Nancy how natural it was to see them as such. There was no physical similarity, obviously, but it was something else that linked them. Like the shadow behind their eyes, but deeper.

"And like Funshine, too," El added, turning to smile at Nancy. Kali raised her brows.

Nancy shifted from foot to foot, looked Kali in the eye, and held out her hand. "I'm Nancy," she said, hoping her voice didn't sound as jittery as she felt. Kali hesitated a second, then took Nancy's hand. Kali's grip was as strong as Nancy thought it would be. She tried to equal it. They shook once, before letting go.

El immediately reclaimed Kali's hand and pulled her toward the couch where Nancy's old clothes were piled. The two girls sat down next to each other, and El looked up at Nancy expectantly.

Nancy realized she was still standing by the window, her eyes following Kali and nothing else. She moved to sit down in a chair adjacent to the couch, folding her hands tightly in her lap.

El had never talked about her sister around Nancy. Mike had said something about the girl having been kidnapped just like El, tortured by the lab because of her powers, just like El. It was more than unnerving, being around someone you knew had been through so much, but not knowing them at all, not knowing how much they knew about you.

"I need to speak to your policeman, Jane," Kali said, her hand still clasping El's. There was a heaviness to her voice, but Nancy wasn't sure if it was concern, or simply the way she spoke.

"Hopper," El said, looking at Kali, barely blinking. Nancy had long noticed El had a way of looking at people directly, often for a long time, without any change in expression. The way Kali looked back at El, Nancy could tell Kali did the same thing, but more purposefully.

"Yes. I have no safe way of contacting him, or you. I had to meet him in person. This cabin isn't within the Hawkins city limits, I understand," Kali said, glancing at Nancy.

"No, it isn't. It's about ten miles out," Nancy said, forcing herself to unclasp her hands. "Hopper won't be here for another couple hours. But I can get a hold of him now, try to make him come earlier...?"

Kali was already shaking her head. "No, I will wait."

"You'll be able to meet my friends," El said, smiling at Kali, leaning closer to her. "I told them about you, about how you helped me," she said. It was an open-ended statement, not there for passing judgment. El was only telling the truth.

Kali tilted her head, her face softening almost imperceptibly. "You trust your friends very much," she said, and El nodded silently.

"We're good at keeping secrets around here," Nancy found herself saying, and Kali's eyes cut to her. Nancy smiled wryly. "I don't know how much El has told you, but there's a lot we're not used to talking about, except amongst ourselves."

"El?" Kali said, raising her brows again. "Is that what you go by here, Jane?"

El nodded once. "I didn't know my birth name until right before I found you. My friends, they first knew me as Eleven. Or El," she explained, her words measured, her expression becoming closed off for the briefest of moments. Nancy wasn't sure Kali had caught it.

"And do you want to still be called by the name the bad men chose for you?" Kali asked, her eyes becoming sharper, if that was possible.

“It means...something different to me. The bad men...they didn’t call me El,” El said, her eyes moving to some distant point past Kali, unfocused. Nancy couldn’t read El’s expression, which worried her even more.

Nancy sprang to her feet. “I’ll get us something to drink,” she said, her voice a little too loud. She shouldn’t be here. She didn’t want to be here. Barely looking at Kali, Nancy turned and headed for the kitchen.

While filling the second cup with water from the tap, Nancy heard footsteps approaching. Nancy turned off the tap, squared her shoulders, and turned.

It was Barb.

The plastic cup fell harmlessly to the kitchen floor, splashing Nancy’s jeans with water. The counter jabbed into her back, a scream caught in her throat, breath suddenly unable to escape her lungs.

Barb was walking toward her, a sad smile frozen on her face.

Nancy blinked, and in Barb’s place was Kali. She stopped to stand barely two feet from Nancy, her face now just as unreadable as El’s had been.

“Reminders of the past aren’t usually welcome,” Kali said, her stare unwavering.

Nancy blinked again, and only then realized tears were running down her face. She wiped at them, pressing her hand hard against her eyes. “Why did you do that?” she said, her voice coming out hollow.

Kali shook her head, her eyes never leaving Nancy’s face. “I didn’t. You did.”

“What?”

“It’s something I learned, before the lab. Those with certain pain inside them, they didn’t need me to go into their mind. They saw what they wanted to see.” Kali took another step toward her, close enough Nancy could see the layers of makeup around her eyes. The

counter pressed harder into her back.

“My mother was the first one. She looked at me one day and saw someone she had lost.” Kali’s voice had become distant, her eyes focused inward on the memory.

But then the shadow in her eyes shifted, and she held Nancy’s gaze. “Who was she?”

The question came out soft, not without emotion. Whether it was sympathy or mockery, Nancy didn’t take the time to distinguish. Her pulse was barely slowing down, her breaths coming out unsteadily through her nose.

“Let El choose her own name. No one here is choosing it for her. Neither should you,” Nancy said. Her face heated as she heard the anger in her voice.

To her surprise, Kali smiled. Nancy only then noticed her nails digging into her palms. Peripherally she saw Kali’s arm move toward one of her hands.

A familiar sequence of knocks sounded at the front door. Kali tore her eyes from Nancy’s and took a step back.

Author's Note:

A new, sort of alternate-universe idea about Nancy occurred to me as I was writing this first chapter. I plan for this to mostly be focused on what I imagine Kali and Nancy's relationship would be like. Depending on your view, there'll be a lot of suspension of disbelief.